

MEDIA RELEASE

12 May 2021:

Budget funds a stool test that saves time and lives

A big winner in last night's Federal Budget is the introduction of Medicare funding to support an important stool test that will make a big difference to healthcare for many Australians.

The test for faecal calprotectin, a marker of inflammation in the intestine, enables treating doctors to distinguish between functional gut disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and organic diseases such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), including Crohn disease and ulcerative colitis.

While these two groups of diseases may present with similar features, the inflammatory bowel diseases have a much more aggressive health outcome and can result in serious complications including cancer. Accurate diagnosis of IBD requires a colonoscopy performed by a specialist gastroenterologist.

Australian Pathology members welcomed the announcement that would benefit some 400,000 Australians.

Dr Lucinda Wallman said testing for faecal calprotectin, which up until now has cost patients up to \$100 a test from their own pockets, is now a test listed and covered by Medicare. This will ease the burden on the healthcare system by enabling GPs and family doctors to identify patients who require specialist referral and invasive investigations such as colonoscopy and biopsy, and those that can be treated by GPs.

"Patients with a normal calprotectin level are very unlikely to have IBD and can avoid colonoscopy and other expensive and time-consuming investigations. GPs can then direct these patients with probable IBS down a more appropriate healthcare management path, and spare limited, invasive and expensive resources - such as colonoscopy - for those with an elevated calprotectin level."

"It's a great victory for patients and for treating doctors and will result in significant saving for the government in scarce healthcare resources." she said.

Along with the faecal calprotectin test, the Government has also funded COVID diagnosis and recovery, as well as access to essential genetic tests, particularly in the area of antenatal and pre-natal care.

Australian Pathology CEO, Liesel Wett, also welcomed the significant investment in new Pathology tests.

Liesel Wett
CEO, Australian Pathology
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Australian Pathology is the peak national body representing private pathology in Australia.

"It is great to see these new pathology tests listed on Medicare, and being able to be accessed by all Australians. Its fantastic news for patients, and for private pathology who delivers the test on behalf of GPs and their patients." said Ms Wett.

"What a great win for all involved, and a true way the private sector is working with the Government to get these tests listed."

"The partnership between the Government and private pathology laboratories has been critical in keeping Australians healthy and we will continue to work with the government on new tests and technologies to ensure they become available to Australians." she said.

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Available for interview:

Dr Lucinda Wallman,
Pathologist in Charge - Immunology
Medical Director, Laverty Pathology

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